



# HOUSE BUDGET COMMITTEE

## DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

*U.S. Rep. John M. Spratt, Jr., Ranking Democratic Member*

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## News Release

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October 19, 1999

**House Floor Statement by U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)  
on H.R. 3085, Discretionary Spending Offsets for Fiscal Year 2000  
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This bill is nothing but a distraction from Congress's real work. We are 19 days into the new fiscal year and only 5 of 13 appropriations bills have been signed into law. Eight bills remain to be enacted. But instead of doing its work, the House is wasting its time, taking up a travesty of a bill, which has no chance of passage.

We have before us the revenue offsets the President proposed last February in his budget. They come to the floor under suspension of the rules, with little opportunity to debate and none to amend. We are being made to vote on these offsets in isolation from the President's initiatives. The President offered them to defray the cost of hiring more teachers and putting more cops on the street. If the majority wants to move the budget process forward, they would let the House vote on the appropriation bill for Labor, HHS, and Education, and let us debate our initiative to cut class sizes in grades 1-3 by hiring 100,000 more teachers.

When you ask yourself why this bill falls under these procedures, you can only conclude that this bill is a red herring, a device to draw attention from CBO's estimates. CBO says that if you back out all the gimmicks, the majority has already spent more than the discretionary spending caps allow, and is \$23.8 billion into the Social Security surplus.

To get out of these problems, the majority has proposed offsets of its own, which are not on the floor. Since this is a debate about offsets, let's take a look at the offsets the majority has proposed, but won't put to a vote on the House floor.

First, they proposed to take \$3 billion in TANF funds away from the states. Republican governors objected so strongly, they dropped that idea.

Then, the majority on the Appropriations Committee passed the DeLay amendment which offset \$9 billion. It raised taxes on the working families with children by stretching out the

payment of their Earned Income Tax Credits. It raised costs for college students borrowing money to pay college tuition. And it met with instant rebuke from none other than the Republican's likely presidential nominee, Governor Bush. Governor Bush charged his party in the House with "balancing the budget on the backs of poor people". So, the majority backed away from that offset as well.

Now the majority is talking about across-the-board spending cuts to all appropriation bills. But \$23 billion is needed, and \$23 billion would require across-the-board cuts of 6.6% in *all* programs including defense and veterans health care. If the majority elected to exempt defense and veterans health care, they would need to cut all other parts of the budget by 15.2%. That would mean deep and crippling cuts in the FBI, Head Start, the National Institute of Health, and education, to name just a few.

Unless we want to spend the rest of this month in pointless bills like this, we need to put aside our differences and work together to bridge this gulf, to hammer out on a bipartisan basis appropriations bills that the President will sign. Yesterday, the President invited the congressional leadership to the White House to discuss ways to break this deadlock. The meeting will take place tonight, and it is a welcome first step. But it is a shame that hours before the meeting, the majority is bringing a partisan and pointless bill to the floor, which has no chance of passage.

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